

The Holy Spirit

Text: John 4: 14

Mission work among the Mohammedans has been called the most difficult in the world. The missionary who goes forth to witness of the one true God is somewhat taken aback to find himself called an idolator and worshiper of many gods. "Christian pig!" the Moslem will revile him, "Away with your three strange gods. There is but one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." It avails little to protest we have but one God. To the Moslem mind the Christian who worships Father, Son, and Holy Ghost has three gods. He is a polytheist.

Admittedly the Trinity is a difficult doctrine. It is found in essence in the Scriptures, but is far from easy to express. Yet it is the unum, the characterizing doctrine of Christianity. This is our belief, as found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

"There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory."

How ask the average Christian to discuss the three persons of the Trinity and he will likely give a clear account of the person and character of God the Father; he will probably be even better informed of God the Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; but press him for a summary of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, and nine times out of ten he will hesitate, and then stumble vaguely through hazy definitions of the Trinity. He will draw misty distinctions between the physical, mental and spiritual nature of man, and will probably refer indefinitely to Pentecost, and tongues of fire, and a rushing wind of the baptism of the Spirit. But

there will be nothing definite.

That ought not to be so. Christianity is clear-cut.

It is imperative for Christians to have a sharp sense of the reality of the Holy Spirit and of his work. As Christians we are responsible for knowledge of the full word of God, and it is astounding to observe, in contrast to the general ignorance on the subject, how much importance is attached to the person of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. May I recommend to you a study of the Spirit through the Scriptures made with the aid of a good Concordance. Follow the subject through the Old Testament, where the Spirit of God is mentioned 134 times, and into the New Testament where every single book save for the little epistles of II and III John refers to his person and work. You will find many names for the Holy Spirit--most often, 420 times in fact, he is simply called the Spirit, but you will also find him referred to as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the holy Comforter or the Spirit of truth, and there are other similar names. Altogether the Holy Spirit is mentioned 470 times in the Scriptures. If God in his word attaches so much importance to the Spirit, what is our excuse for knowing so little about him.

Oh, we have our excuses. We say the subject is not important or too difficult. But 470 references makes any subject important, and its very difficulty should challenge us the more to penetrate the obscurity surrounding the subject. Finally, we being sober and sedate Presbyterians will object that there's too much ranting and raving on the subject, too much emotional display and babbling of tongues in connection with this generous doctrine of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. But what of it? Are we afraid to face the truth? Are we building our faith on such a shaky foundation that we dare not investigate lest we be found wrong? The truths of the Holy Spirit are vital truths. Standing firmly on the word of God we can seek them out with boldness.

In the first place, fuzzy thinking about the person of the Holy Spirit must be cleared away. Too often we betray the indeterminate nature of our concept by referring to the Spirit as It. The Spirit is not a thing; he is a person. He personally directed the work of the early church, particularly in its missionary activity as is shown in Acts 13: 2 where the Spirit says to the Christians at Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." He personally directs the life of the believer, as we are told in Romans 8: 9. He even has feelings and emotions, for Paul warns us to "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God." in Ephesians 4: 30. These verses portray qualities and acts that are the qualities and acts of personality. The third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, is as distinct a personality as the heavenly Father, and the Son who walked the streets of Jerusalem.

Turn now to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a well-rounded work. He was the agent of God in creation; the Spirit brooded upon the face of the waters in the second verse of Genesis. Peter tells us that he inspired the writers of the Holy Scriptures (II Peter 1: 20), and freed their minds from error. He gave vision to the prophets, and power to the apostles. The Spirit has also guided and over-ruled in the growth of the church, and in its councils. The Spirit moved Athanasius to stand against the world in defense of the deity of Christ when Aryan heresy threatened the very core and center of the gospel message; the Holy Spirit moved in Luther to defy a pagan pope and proclaim the authority of the Scriptures as the highest authority for Christian faith and practice; and the Holy Spirit is moving today against the spread of unbelief and indifference within the Christian church itself, and thank God he still moves in evangelistic power on the mission field. Not so long ago my father was asked by a world-traveler what he considered the reason for the amazing missionary success in Korea. He replied, "We have lifted up the word of God for fifty years before these people; the Holy Spirit has done the rest."

However, Christianity is not a mass movement. No theory of mob psychology, or of mass impulse, can account for its phenomenal growth and power. Rather, Christianity is the sum of innumerable individual conversions. Its power is the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus manifested in the life of each believer. And therefore, though we cannot deprecate the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, any study must give first place to his work in the life of the individual.

Right at the outset we are confronted with a difficulty--that is, the unscriptural doctrine that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace in the believers' life; that first the repentant sinner must be saved but subsequently there will follow an ineffable experience, often emotional, which is the baptism of the Spirit. With this we disagree, but not dogmatically. A man once criticized the great Bible teacher, Dr. Torrey, on a point of theology, and upon a minister observed, "I'd like to be tangled up a little in theology too like Torrey, if I could only have some of his power in saving souls!" And yet it seems that the doctrine of a second work of grace would give us two classes of Christians--ordinary saved Christians, and super-special Holy Ghost Christians. That is absurd. There is no pious aristocracy in the ranks of Christian believers. We are one in the Lord. The believer is baptized with the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion. That is the testimony of the Scriptures. *If this baptism is not at conversion, but must be sought afterwards, why is there not a single exhortation in the NT to Christians to seek the baptism of the Spirit.*

To those God-fearing, but misled church members who sit at home weeping over their ineffectiveness in praying for the gifts of the Spirit instead of rejoicing that he already dwells in them, Paul cries: "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" (I Cor. 6: 19) The Spirit is in you now--Paul is speaking to believers. And Peter corroborates his statement in the great Pentecost sermon by pointing out that the conditions are the same for salvation and baptism with the

Spirit. "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," he says. If you have repented of your sins, and believed in Jesus as your Saviour, which is symbolized by the sacrament of baptism, you don't have to feel saved; you are saved, as the Scriptures prove: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." The same thing is true of baptism with the Spirit. If you are saved, don't pray for the Spirit, he is already in you. Believe the testimony of the Scriptures, and don't depend on your emotions to tell you of his presence. McConkey, that Spirit-filled preacher, said:

"Beloved, even though we had never had a single emotional experience of the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost; yet would we be bold indeed--to say nothing worse--to deny the glorious fact of His indwelling in the face of the constant, explicit assertions of God that we are His temple, that He does dwell in us and that we have this great gift of the Spirit from God now."

Like the man who was led to the Lord while walking along the railroad track, and who afterwards mistakenly insisted that all must be saved as he was on a railroad track; so there are some who insist that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is always accomplished in the same way. They declare that a spiritual ecstasy, an emotional overflow must necessarily accompany this gift, but with these we cannot agree. Religious experience runs in no narrow mold. A Paul, or a Jonathan Edwards may write of an electric joy in their souls at conversion; but the quiet, sober witness of a John or a David Livingstone is just as full of the Spirit. Still water runs deep.

There are those as well who insist that the gift of speaking in tongues is the only sure sign of baptism with the Spirit, but with these too we do not agree. Ever since the Sadducees and Pharisees came to Jesus to tempt him by asking for a sign from heaven, men of little faith have been asking for signs. But God does not always speak in signs and wonders.

When he does it is for some special reason, as in the three great ages of miracles; the age of Moses, the age of Elijah, and the time of Christ.

We have four main records in the Acts of baptism with the Spirit. In three, speaking with tongues was an accompaniment. But each of these manifestations of God's power was distinct from the others, and was given for a definite reason. We are not told to seek duplications of these Apostolic experiences today, any more than we are to expect water to gush from the rock at our command as it did for Moses. The gift of tongues at Pentecost marked God's blessing upon the launching of the church by the disciples. The baptism of the spirit upon Philip's converts in Samaria, and the gift of tongues to the household of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, was an indication from God that the gospel of salvation was not reserved for the Jews, but was for the world, the Samaritan and the gentile as well as his own chosen people. And when Paul came to Ephesus and found disciples of John there who had not heard of Jesus nor of the work of the Spirit, God sent down again the gift of tongues upon them that the church might not discriminate against this body of believers--the disciples of John the Baptist.

So we can see that the gift of speaking with tongues was peculiar to the age of the early church. Paul did not minimize for an instant the all-important place of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, but it was not long after Pentecost that he saw fit to warn the Corinthian church against a confusion of tongues. He had the gift of sober common-sense.

"In the church," he says, "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also (five words that men can understand), than ten thousand words in a tongue."

If Paul were writing to us today, he'd say, "I'd rather preach five words in English than ten thousand in a tongue." He tells us to walk, not talk, in the Spirit.

But what, then, is the gift of the Spirit? As a matter of fact, there are many gifts. Just as in Old Testament times the Spirit of God fell, on the one hand, upon Bezaleel the craftsman (Ex. 31) and gave him power to work cunningly in gold and silver and brass; and on the other, fell upon God's prophets so that they spake his word in power; so today the Spirit will come and dwell in the heart of the mechanic at his work, and the minister in his pulpit. The same Spirit falls upon both, but with different gifts (I Cor. 12: 3ff.) Sometimes we get a wrong impression about the gifts of the Spirit. Perhaps we read Galatians 5: 22 this way: "The fruit of the Spirit is the gift of strange tongues, and of prophecy, of religious ecstasy and emotion, of mighty power in preaching." But does Paul write that? He certainly does not. This is the scriptural truth of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual:

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law."

Christians, don't pray for a spiritual earthquake in your lives; don't pray for a great manifestation of God's power in you. Too often we pray that selfishly. Pray rather for the fruit of the Spirit: love, peace, gentleness, meekness. Master the secret of humble faith, and you shall not lack power.

There is a final truth that must not be ignored. We who have received the eternal glories of salvation by simple faith in our risen Saviour; we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us now. But--and this is important--until we surrender our lives wholly to that indwelling presence, until we yield our wills to His so that we can say with Christ in Gethsemane, "Not my will, Lord, but thine be done,"--not until then will we know the peace and joy that comes with the filling of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Ghost is received at conversion, but we cannot be

filled with Him until we yield our lives to him.

Perhaps this illustration will make it plain. Lawrence of Arabia brought several native chieftans with him to the Paris Peace Conference. These sons of the desert were amazed at many things, but nothing else astonished them so much as the running water in their hotel rooms. They knew the scarcity of water, and its value; yet here it was, to be had by the turning of a tap, free and exhaustless. When they were preparing to leave Paris, Lawrence found them trying to detach the faucets, so that, out in their deserts, they might have water. He tried to explain that behind the flowing water were huge reservoirs, and that without this supply the faucets were useless. But the Arabians insisted. They were sure that, armed with these magic instruments, they would have an exhaustless source of water.

Before we smile at their simplicity, let us pause and search our own hearts. Are we not even more naive in our Christian lives. The Arabians expected water from unattached faucets; we look for water to run from a closed tap. Yes, we do. In our souls are the deep reservoirs of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In our text Jesus called it a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The Holy Spirit is in us waiting to fill our lives with power for Christian service. But we cling selfishly to our own lives and ambitions. As water will not flow through a closed faucet, so the Spirit cannot work through a self-willed life. Don't fail to surrender to the Spirit which worketh in you. Don't fail to turn the tap.